By Ernie Ward, DVM, CVFT





The Future I Said No To

Sometimes the biggest barrier to your clinic's growth is you.

Growing up in the 1970s, I was promised robots, flying cars, and dinner in a pill. If ChatGPT is as close as I get to "The Jetsons," I want my flying car. The future I turned down wasn't on TV. It was in my own building, wearing scrubs.

It was 2008, and I had a good idea of what the next big thing in veterinary medicine would be: pet obesity, nutrition, behavior, and doggie daycare. I was so convinced that I built an adjoining facility dedicated to these services. One of my longtime credentialed technicians — I'll call her Jen — offered to run the routine weight-loss visits, including coaching sessions, treadmill workouts, and nutrition consults. I said no. She didn't argue. She waited.

I knew Jen was capable. The barrier was that I didn't believe our clients would pay to see a credentialed technician. Maybe it was my ego or a fear of losing clients, but I didn't budge.

I wish I could say wisdom changed my mind. My schedule did.

Within six months, we were booked solid for weeks out. The future I'd built that clinic for was stuck behind me. So, I gave in.

Jen was better at those visits than I was. I still saw every patient first, made the diagnoses, and outlined the treatment plans. She delivered them and handled the weigh-ins, the treadmill sessions, the food questions, and the small wins that gave everyone hope. When a case needed a veterinarian, one was always steps away.

The appointments held steady without my constant presence, then multiplied. Even the clients I feared would demand to see me began requesting the team instead. By 2010, two credentialed technicians, with their own support staff, delivered most of the clinic's uncomplicated weight-loss and behavioral services. Our standards didn't slip; they scaled. I thought the future was the building. It was the people inside it.

If you have a Jen, you've probably already said no. I did. This time of year, we all go shopping for what's next — new software, new equipment, maybe a new building. What's next for your practice may not be for sale. It may be standing in your treatment area, waiting for you to get out of the way. Mine waited six months while I hid behind my clients. I've never asked her how much longer she would have waited.

HARD-EARNED

The clients weren't holding back the future. I was.

■ *Dr. Ernie Ward is an award-winning veterinarian, impact entrepreneur, book author, and media personality. He hosts the "Veterinary Viewfinder" podcast.*

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